

## Optional Features for Outdoor Learning Areas

### Walking Trail

**Description** – A walking trail provides an environment for students, teachers, and the community to explore the characteristics and interactions among native plants and organisms. Opportunities for exploring ecosystems, life cycles, investigating habitats and adaptations, comparing and analyzing soil types, and growing and maintaining different kinds of plants abound. Walking trails may be self-guiding with interpretive panels and exhibits at various learning stations along the path or without interpretive signs, they may simply be areas for discovery.. Walking trails may also double as exercise trails for both students and the local community

**Size** – A typical walking time to walk a trail would be 20 to 45 minutes (one to three miles). The size depends on the area, the age/grade of the walker, and what is to be observed.

**Location** – The walking trail may be located anywhere that is suitable for walking and has a diversity of native plants, animals, and other organisms. Make sure that the trail is located in a safe area. A successful trail is easily accessible and attractive in its layout. Incorporate wheel chair access into the trail design. Creating trails is an excellent way to connect your school with your local neighborhood since both the school and the local residents will benefit from the trail.



**Materials Needed** –The material on the walkway may be gravel, mulch, or simply mowed grass. However, you may need a harder surface if your trail is

to be wheelchair accessible. Benches or picnic tables along the way can provide a resting spot for walkers with special needs, and a place to gather for group discussions. Native plants may be supplemented in strategic areas along the trail. Once the trail is established, it is a matter of accessing the existing natural areas and adding learning stations to them (See other ideas in this booklet: Butterfly Gardens, Soils, Wetlands, Wildlife Habitats, Birds, etc.). If there are wetlands, allow students to get a closer look at flora and fauna by building suitable bridges and walkways. Signage, markers, and/or guides are optional.

**Labor Needed** – Setting up a walking trail begins with the labor needed to carve the trail itself. A small trail can be made the same width as a mower. Heavy equipment may be needed to clear larger trails. Building picnic tables and/or benches and creating appropriate signage will also require labor.

**Technical Assistance** – The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife (<http://www.kdfwr.state.ky.us/>) will donate up to 20 native plants. Contact state and local park staff (<http://www.kystateparks.com/>) near you for advice on where and how to locate trails.

**Maintenance** – Check the trail on a regular basis for fallen trees and other obstructions. Remove poison ivy, poison oak, invasive plant species, etc. when possible. Ask adults who use the trail to help with maintenance.

**Challenges** – Make sure all students have appropriate shoes for walking, a permission form listing any allergies, and access to a safety kit that includes insect repellent and treatment for stings/bites. Railings or line leading ropes may need to be installed for safety issues in various areas along the trail. The recent popularity of four wheelers has caused some to install lockable gates at the beginning and end of trails.